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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

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E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4

NJ 86-286

By 48 NARA. Date 2-25-88

Research Memorandum
RAR-49, November 29, 1963

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To : The Secretary
Through: S/S
From : INR - Thomas L. Hughes *Thomas L. Hughes*
Subject: Clandestine Arms Traffic In Latin America and the Insurgency Problem

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There are recurring reports of communist arms shipments to insurgent groups in Latin America. This report assesses available information on clandestine shipments of weapons, particularly with reference to Cuban or Soviet bloc complicity in such traffic, and identifies those areas in Latin America where significant quantities of weapons are in civilian hands.

ABSTRACT

Clandestine Arms Traffic. Few Latin American governments have effective control over ownership of and traffic in arms. Nongovernmental groups or individual civilians hold large stocks of weapons in the area, notably in Central America, Colombia, Venezuela and Bolivia. The only known Soviet bloc military shipments to Latin America were made in 1954 to the communist-dominated Arbenz regime in Guatemala and to Cuba since 1960. There was no confirmation of Cuban arms reaching the rest of the hemisphere in large quantities until the discovery of an arms cache in Venezuela in early November 1963.

Insurgency Problem. Communist training of subversives, propaganda support and financing represent a greater threat to the internal security situation of most Latin American countries than arms supplied through

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the efforts of Cuba or the European communist countries. The means for instruction already are at hand in the form of arms that have been readily available to the civilian population for years.

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Areas where civilian-held arms most common

Significant quantities of weapons are in the hands of individual civilians or nongovernmental groups, particularly in Venezuela, Bolivia, Colombia and Central America. At the moment, the threat to internal security posed by these supplies of firearms is most apparent in Venezuela and Colombia. Venezuela has been undergoing a sporadic but increasing terrorist campaign by extremist forces, led since early 1962 by the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN), which uses small arms that are readily available in the country. Political parties have traditionally maintained arsenals in case of emergency. After the fall of President Pérez Jiménez in 1958, the ruling junta attempted to forestall a counter-revolution by distributing weapons to certain segments of the population. Those arms are still circulating in Venezuela, and with sufficient money a small arsenal can be accumulated. The FALN also has resorted to raids on police stations, military depots and commercial dealers in arms.

Colombia has been plagued by rural violence, bandit gangs and quasi-guerrilla groups for many years. Private groups in the rural areas long have been in possession of weapons. Most arms now held by bandit groups appear to have come from Colombian Army stocks, either by theft or occasional illicit purchases, and some were dispersed during the April 1948 riots in Bogotá. A smaller quantity may have entered the country as purchased contraband. There have been variously evaluated reports of arms smuggling across the border from Venezuela, Panama, and Ecuador.

Large quantities of small arms are owned by civilians in the Central American republics. In Guatemala, for example, civilian elements have had access to substantial stocks of arms for more than a decade. It is likely that some of the 12,000 weapons of World War II manufacture supplied by Czechoslovakia to Guatemala near the end of the Arévalo regime in 1954 have fallen into private hands. Most of the remainder is believed to be in government storage or out of commission, although only a few hundred of these weapons are presently shown in Army inventory. US weapons brought into Guatemala by Castillo Armas' Liberation Army during the same year represent another source of supply which has suffered at least partial diversion to civilian groups. Small guerrilla bands operating in the Guatemalan-Honduran and Honduran-Nicaraguan border regions also have managed to secure arms by sporadic raids on government garrisons.

Significant quantities of firearms are in the hands of the civilian populace in El Salvador; there have never been any important restrictions on ownership of weapons, and they have been widely held there for many years. In Costa Rica, several stocks of arms are under the control of groups other than regular security forces: an anticommunist, pro-government civilian security force called the Free Costa Rica Movement has a significant number of weapons, as do the antigovernment Revolutionary Civic Union and various communist groups. Weapons have circulated about the Caribbean from one country to another (including Cuba during Castro's Sierra Maestra days). Some of the arms are probably inherited from the Caribbean Legion, an irregular military force whose several hundred members sought to overthrow dictatorial regimes in the area during the late 1940's. Others have been made available by defectors from the security forces, or have been purchased through the constant trade in arms endemic to the area.

Bolivia probably has the most heavily armed population in Latin America, except for Cuba. Not only are weapons generally available for those with funds for their purchase, but organized militia groups have been in existence for more than a decade. During the 1952 revolution arms depositories were opened to supporters of the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR), and some 20,000 rifles were dispersed among the populace. Following the installation of the MNR government and the virtual liquidation of the Bolivian Army at that time, the miners and other workers were formed into militia groups with their own leaders and weapons supplies. Peasant militia groups also were organized and armed by the government. Militia groups in Bolivia, only a few thousand of whose members are under the direct control of the government, are equal to or larger than the police and the army combined in terms of manpower.

Although stocks of arms in varying quantities are held by civilians in other Latin American countries, in most cases the danger of subversive efforts resulting from the availability of weapons is not acute, either because the stocks are small or the security forces are effective. Only in the Dominican Republic has there been a noticeable increase in availability of weapons to civilians during the past year — or since the departure of the Trujillos in late 1961. In recent weeks large-scale smuggling of weapons parts from the government arms factory has reportedly placed several hundred sub-machine guns in civilian hands. Controls on the possession and import of arms in a number of countries serve to restrict supplies to some extent, at least of newer weapons. For years Brazil, where firearms, including automatic weapons, are manufactured, has

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been the locus of numerous reports on arms cached by opposition groups, both of the left and of the right; no reports of large-scale collections of arms have been confirmed, however.

Arms smuggling: Cuban and Soviet bloc involvement

Arms smuggling in several areas has gone on for years. Central America is particularly well known for this traffic. There has been small-scale gun-running between Bolivia and Peru, in both directions, for some years. Reports are received periodically concerning arms shipments in outlying, poorly-policed regions of most Latin American countries, but they are difficult to confirm, especially with respect to the origin of the shipments.

Frequently reported is complicity of the communist countries in arms traffic in Latin America. Good evidence of gun-running by sea was discovered in the Dominican Republic in 1962. The presumed recipient of the arms was an extreme leftist group, but there was nothing to prove that the weapons had come from Cuba. Transshipment of arms by Soviet ships off Belém and other Amazonian ports is re- currently rumored, and it is possible that such deliveries have been made to Brasil and other countries, but there has been no substantiation of the reports. An Italian ship allegedly transporting arms from Cuba to Venezuela in March 1963 was searched by Venezuelan police without result, at its first port of call after leaving Havana. In various instances where specific reports of weapons smuggling have been confirmed (in Guatemala, for example), only small quantities were found to be involved.

The first well-corroborated Cuban shipment of arms in quantity was made to Venezuela. On November 28, 1963, the Venezuelan Government announced that it had incontrovertible proof of Cuban arms-smuggling to Venezuelan terrorists, and subsequently requested a meeting of the Council of the Organization of American States be called under the Treaty of Rio de Janeiro dealing with threats to peace and security in the hemisphere. The arms in question--a three-ton cache discovered on the coast of Falcon State November 3, 1963--reportedly included 18 bazookas, 4 mortars, 3 57-mm. recoilless rifles, 26 submachine guns and 100 automatic rifles. The arms were of western manufacture (Belgian and US) delivered to Cuba during or prior to 1960, and some bore the Cuban shield and markings.

Significantly, there have been no reported instances of weapons of recent Soviet or Eastern European manufacture captured or discovered in the area in the hands of subversive groups. Large stocks of Czech

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military firearms still exist in Latin America, but these are almost without exception older weapons, some dating to the 1920's. Small quantities of Czech sporting arms are imported into some countries (Brazil, Venezuela, El Salvador). There have been scattered reports, some from reliable sources, of Czech embassy officials presenting modern hand weapons to certain individuals; the most accurate information on this is available from Bolivia, where Czechoslovakia is active in the trade and propaganda fields. Nevertheless, the only significant Soviet or Eastern European shipments of weapons known to have been destined for Latin America were to Guatemala in 1964 and Cuba beginning in 1960.

Arms traffic and threat to internal security

The prime threat to internal security in Latin America, as far as weapons are concerned, comes from existing stocks of arms available to the civilian populace. The threat could be increased by Soviet supplies or by shipments from Cuba's large supply of small arms, including as many as 100,000 units of Western origin acquired before or during 1960. Cuba's arsenal is a near-by potential source of weapons for dissident groups in the hemisphere, particularly if the Cuban holdings continue to be augmented and standardized with additional Soviet equipment. An increase in terrorist and guerrilla activities in most countries of Latin America would not depend on Soviet or Cuban supplies, however. Arms usually are available for those who want them badly enough, and the clandestine introduction of weapons could probably not be made in sufficient quantity to materially alter the internal security situation of most countries.

The primary impact of Cuba, and of other communist countries, on the insurgency problem in the hemisphere is in terms of subversive training, propaganda and financing. Easily transportable funds supplied from communist sources for the purchase locally of weapons and munitions are more useful to insurgent groups than actual arms shipments with all the attendant dangers of discovery, publicity, and retaliatory action by the governments concerned.